

The more the merrier? An exploration into intergenerational reconnection holiday experiences

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Family travel is predicted to grow at a faster rate than all other forms of leisure travel, partly because it represents a way to reunite the family and for family members to spend time with each other, away from the demands of work (Schänzel, Yeoman, & Backer, 2012).

Increasingly re-connection holidays across generations become a way for extended families to spend valuable time together (Butlin, 2012). For example, a survey in the US by Trip Advisor (2011) reveals that 37 percent of respondents plan to take a multi-generational family trip in that year. Several demographic trends are slowly changing the structures in society leading to more complex family models. The resulting changes include increasing longevity leading to stronger multigenerational ties and trends to smaller families leading to stronger social networks outside the immediate family (OECD, 2008). Fewer children in society mean they become more important and the focus across generations. With increased mobility intergenerational reconnection holidays allow geographically dispersed family members to bond and create lasting memories. The tourism industry will need to consider evolving their offer to accommodate these bigger, more vertical and more fluid family units.

To date, quantitative research has predominated in tourism resulting in mainly individual interpretations of group behaviour unsuitable to account for the sociality present in the collective experiences of family groups (Obrador, 2012; Schänzel & Smith, 2014). This explorative study is based on mainly group and some individual interviews conducted with five New Zealand multi-generational families holidaying in Samoa in April and July of 2014, involving a total of 18 participants. Interviews were conducted with various family members, including children and adult sisters, who came together on their overseas holiday but live geographically apart. Interviewing families on holiday then allows for instant access to the

entire family which is one of the biggest obstacles for family research. The interviews are currently being transcribed and will then be collated and coded using thematic analysis.

Preliminary analysis highlights the benefits and stresses of holidaying in close proximity with family members who have different needs and different family affiliations, such as holidaying with parents in law. Three of the multi-generational families included babies and toddlers (including a child with Down Syndrome) which required special accommodation facilities. The family rooms offered were often not conducive to enable children and adults with different sleeping times and abilities to share accommodation harmoniously. Backer and Schänzel (2013) already identified negative aspects in holiday accommodation as including not having everything that one would find at home, such as facilities that are neither safe nor child-friendly and conditions not conducive to sleep. Against this background there is a need for hotels/resorts to better meet the needs of children and their parents and grand-parents, for example, through designing family-friendly rooms enabling a degree of privacy (Carr, 2011) or through the flexibility of interconnected rooms (Butlins, 2012). This would allow multi-generational families to maximise the time they want to be close together while still allowing for some privacy for individual family members. Hospitality providers then need to better cater to the different spatial needs of multi-generational families to ensure positive holiday memory formation and elimination of stresses leading to longer stays and repeat visits.

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Bio:

Dr Heike Schänzel is a senior lecturer in international tourism management at Auckland University of Technology, New Zealand. Heike's doctoral thesis examined family holiday experiences for the whole family group from a New Zealand perspective. She is passionate about better understanding family fun (along with the avoidance of conflict) as well as the facilitation of sociality within the context of tourism and hospitality. Her research interests include families and children in tourism, tourist experiences, sociality in tourism, innovative and qualitative research methodologies, and critical theory development in tourism and hospitality.